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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY

HINTS ON THE CARE OF DOMESTICATED MICE, AND RATS

Domesticated mice, which include white, black, waltzing, silver, and other tame mice, are kept as pets, and also are used extensively in medical laboratories for testing remedies and for determining types of certain diseases. They thrive best in a temperature of about 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

FOOD:

A standard ration for domesticated mice is bread soaked in milk, which supplies food and drink. Those kept as pets should be given uncracked nuts and hard grains to prevent their gnawing teeth from becoming overlong. Green food, as lettuce, chickweed, or boiled carrots, potatoes, or parsnips, should be furnished in small quantities occasionally. Fresh water should be in every cage. All dishes should be disinfected frequently by scalding.

BREEDING:

Sexual maturity is attained at from 2 to 3 months of age. The young are carried about 21 days before they are born, are weaned when 20 to 25 days old, and are suitable for laboratory use when six weeks old. Females can produce an average of five young in a litter every thirty days, till they are about 18 months old. Usually, however, it is best not to breed them while they are nursing young, as they soon break down under the strain of supporting two litters at the same time. This plan brings successive litters at intervals of six or seven weeks and may be expected to produce in the course of a year about forty young mice from each breeding female. Each male has three or four females which occupy his cage when they are without young. Each female is removed to a breeding cage of her own before her young are born and is kept there until her young are weaned.

CAGES:

An excellent mouse cage can be made from a small wooden packing-box about eight inches wide, ten inches long and six inches high. The bottom should be removed and a sheet of galvanized wire netting, 1/4 inch mesh, put in its place. Another piece of the netting should be used as a cover for the box, the edges being turned downward to hold it in place. This cage is designed to be set in a tray of wood or galvanized iron, about one inch deep and nearly filled with sawdust, dry earth or other absorbent, which should slightly cover the wire bottom of the cage. Nesting material consisting of cut straw or paper should be provided. Similar cages, of larger size, are used for young mice after they have been weaned, when a large number of them may be allowed to run together.

The foregoing directions for raising domesticated mice also apply to domesticated rats, excepting, of course, a larger cage is used. A cage similar to that described for the use of mice may be used for rats except that the box should be 12 inches wide, 36 inches long, and 10 inches high for each pair of rats.

Domesticated rats may be fed on garbage to a greater extent than is practicable with mice.



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U. S. Department of Agriculture  
RATS

HINTS ON THE CARE OF WHITE MICE AND RATS

The information in this leaflet is based for the most part on the food and breeding habits and the housing requirements of white mice, but in the main it will apply also to other kinds of domesticated mice and to white rats. White mice and rats are raised principally for use in medical laboratories, in testing remedies and in determining certain types of disease. They are raised also as pets. They thrive best in a temperature of about 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

FOOD:

A standard ration for these animals is bread soaked in milk, which supplies both food and drink. Those kept as pets should be given uncracked nuts and hard grains to prevent their gnawing teeth from becoming overlong. Green food, such as lettuce, chickweed, or boiled carrots, potatoes, or parsnips, should be furnished in small quantities occasionally. Fresh water should be supplied in every cage. All dishes should be kept clean and should be disinfected frequently by scalding.

BREEDING:

Sexual maturity is attained at from 2 to 3 months of age. The young are carried about 21 days before they are born and are weaned when 20 to 25 days old. They are suitable for laboratory use when six weeks old. Females can produce on the average five young in a litter every 30 days until they are about 18 months old. Usually, however, it is best not to breed them a second time until they have ceased nursing the first litter, for they soon break down under the strain of supporting two litters at the same time. This plan brings successive litters at intervals of six or seven weeks and may be expected to produce in the course of a year about 40 young mice from each breeding female. Each male may have three or four females occupying its cage when they are without young. Each female is removed to a separate cage of her own before the young are born and is kept there until they are weaned.

CAGES:

Experiments with both wooden and metal cages have shown that better results may be had in a large colony by the use of wooden cages, other conditions being equal. Cages should be approximately 16 inches long, 14 inches wide, and 10 inches high, inside measurements. The front, back, and bottom should be made of 1/4-inch square-mesh galvanized-wire netting, and the bottom should be so constructed that a dry pan can be placed underneath. Clean straw or shavings provide good bedding. Parchment paper or excelsior should be supplied for nesting material.

More complete information on raising white mice and rats is contained in "Breeding and Care of the Albino Rat for Research Purposes," by Milton J. Greenman and F. Louise Dehring, published by the Wister Institute of Anatomy and Biology, Philadelphia, Pa.; and "Pets for Pleasure and Profit," by A. Hyatt Verrill, published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, N. Y.

